

# Prevent the Spread of the West Nile Virus... Install a Pond

By Kirk Samis and Kelly Tunney

Unless you are an extraterrestrial who just this minute landed on Earth from another planet, you almost certainly have heard at least some of the hysteria surrounding the spread of the West Nile Virus this past summer. *Do your part in preventing its spread next season, and make sure you have a pond.*

## The Numbers Are Scary

While the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) attempts to calm people down about the spread of the West Nile Virus, stating, "Human illness from the West Nile virus is rare, even in areas where the virus has been reported," pond owners are worried ... and so are their neighbors. With 4156 cases reported in 2002, and a death toll of 284, ponds have been watched very carefully.

## How Can a Pond Owner Help?

As one can see from a review of the list of carriers, the most obvious form of transmission to humans is through mosquitoes. Here is where your pond comes into the picture. As mosquitoes typically lay their eggs in water habitats, in the hysteria surrounding the transmission of this virus, your neighbors may begin to eye your water garden as a contributing problem.

On the website for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, a hotline is listed for reporting such concerns. In reality, a well-balanced pond can actually help mitigate the spread of the West Nile Virus. The problem is not with flowing pond water ... but stagnant, standing water. You can help reduce the number of mosquitoes in your area by draining sources of standing water. In this way, you reduce the number of places mosquitoes can lay their eggs and breed.

## A Balanced Pond Ecosystem

The typical water environments sought by mosquitoes when laying their eggs may include old tires, planter saucers, and birdbaths – anywhere there is standing water. In order to stop mosquitoes from congregating in your yard, you should empty water from flowerpots, pet food and water dishes, birdbaths, swimming pool covers, buckets, barrels, and cans at least once or twice a week. You should also check for clogged rain gutters and clean them out, as well as remove discarded tires and other

items that could collect water. Of all potential water habitats, a pond is the perfect environment.

Actually, of all potential water habitats, a pond is the perfect environment for mosquitoes. While this might seem alarming, in reality, attracting mosquitoes to lay eggs in your pond rather than other water environments is exactly what you want to do. If the pond is a complete ecosystem, then there are also fish present.

In a balanced ecosystem, it is not necessary to feed fish (although it can be fun for entertainment). Mosquito larvae are the quintessential delicacy for fish ... and fish don't miss an opportunity to graze on them when they are present. This is especially true if the fish are not fed regularly and are used to foraging for their food.

So, if your neighbor wants to report your pond as a contributing factor to the spread of the West Nile Virus, welcome them to check out your pond. See any mosquito eggs or larvae? Ask when they intend to install a pond and do their part for prevention.

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